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THE GERMAN WOMAN OF TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY.

MORE than a year ago there met in Berlin a Woman's International Congress. "This congress," says Monsieur G. Valbert, writing in the "*Revue des Deux Mondes*," "was very much better organized and regulated than the one that was held previously at Paris." The meetings were presided over by Mme. Morgenstein, who has a genius for organization, and by Mme. Cauer, who about ten years ago founded the association for the advancement of women.

"German middle-class women," says this writer, "are, of all the advocates of the rights of their sex, the most prudent, sensible, and circumspect, the most moderate in their discourse as well as in their desires and demands; they represent, in fact, a mitigated and reasonable 'womanism.' Since there are contagions which nobody can escape, the time will doubtless come when, like their sisters in England and America, they will claim political equality and the suffrage; but there was no question of these in the September meetings. They want the universities thrown open to them, and then the privilege of obtaining, if they can, diplomas which will permit them to practice medicine and fill professorial chairs. They demand the revision of certain articles in the civil code, which restrict them to a state of shocking dependence; they want the condition of laboring women improved and their pay increased and made proportionate to their toil; they want the law to come to their aid in the fight against intemperance, from which these poor creatures suffer sorely. When Mme. Cauer delivered her closing address in three languages, she could bear testimony that no member of the congress had transgressed the bounds of propriety, and that the reforms which it had resolved to advocate were no vain Utopias. To assure to the married woman an efficient protection of her natural rights, and withdraw her from the tyranny of a husband who would trade upon her

industry; to procure for her who either cannot or will not marry facilities for self-support, by the opening of careers long closed to her just ambition—these, up to the present time, are the modest requirements of the German middle-class womanism.”

The German association for the advancement of the rights of women has doubtless had to contend with many obstacles in its way. Of these difficulties none, perhaps, is greater than the iron fetters which custom has riveted on the women of that country. And they are not eager to change their lot. The German woman has been born and reared in this condition of society; and, being conservative, she makes but little effort to break with the past and to throw off the yoke which a time-honored custom has imposed upon her. Her sphere of activity is the home; her duty, chiefly maternity. She regards herself as the servant of her “mann,” as she calls her husband, to the care of whose comfort she surrenders herself entirely. This is her conception of the duty of woman. Thus has custom decreed, and she renders a willing and blind obedience to its decrees.

Goethe has portrayed the German ideal of womanly character in his conception of the Italian princess Leonora d’Este, in his psychological drama of “Torquato Tasso,” in which he has so powerfully drawn the tragedy of a poet’s life. Goethe based his play on the theory that Tasso was shut up in prison because of his aspirations for the hand of Leonora, whom custom did not permit to marry him, though she loved him passionately, simply because she was a princess and he only a poet. She was thus forced to renounce her love, however great her sacrifice, lest she should violate an imperious demand of custom, which forbade a princess to marry one below her rank. “Nach Freiheit strebt der Mann, das Weib nach Sitte,” is her despairing cry as she submits to the inevitable and foregoes her cherished desire. In this play, a noted German critic has said, self-denial, moderation, and renunciation appear as the chief requirements for a wise conduct of life, and women are the guardians of morality and good manners. The comment is

characteristic. The submissive Leonora is praised by the Germans as the ideal of womanly character, and her example is held up before their admiring daughters for emulation. Self-sacrificing, noble, and womanly it must be confessed the princess is, but too submissive and lacking in independence and in tenacity of purpose. How unlike the American woman!

Service is what the German husband expects of his wife. Whether it is that he does not regard her as on terms of intellectual equality with himself, or as destitute of all sympathy and interest in matters outside of the domestic circle, or whatever the cause, certainly he does not discuss affairs of public importance with her, but only matters of the household, and even here she does not venture to ventilate her views too freely, though it may all have come through her dowry. She shares very little in the society of her husband. Baring-Gould calls it a "divorce of souls," and says that the men have excluded the women from their society and pour out their wealth of ideas among their fellow-men in their clubs and taverns, but never in their homes. Hence the lives of the women have been dwarfed and narrowed down so that they do not care about what is going on in the great outside world. Their interests are circumscribed by the narrow limits of the nursery and kitchen. Or, as it is reported to have been said by the present emperor, whose authority in this, as in all other matters, is presumably ultimate, woman's sphere is bounded by the three K's: *Kirche*, *Kuche*, and *Kinderstube* ("Church," "kitchen," and "nursery").

It is probably this restriction of woman's sphere and the consequent curtailment of her interests that explain the absence in German literature of such feminine names as those of Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mrs. Browning, or Mrs. Cross, whose works so adorn our literature. Not that German women are uneducated, or wanting in appreciation of literary productions, or destitute of creative minds. The severe and thorough training in the female high schools forbids this assumption. The state conducts these schools with characteristic completeness, and the course is by no means one to be despised.

The teachers in Germany are, as a class, far better educated than the teachers in America or in England, the ranks being usually recruited from the graduates of the universities. (This is far from true of our public school teachers, as every one knows who has read the articles that have appeared of late in the various journals upon the subject of the training of our teachers.) The Victoria Lyceum, in Berlin, not to mention others, offers excellent opportunities to the German girls, and its course will bear favorable comparison in many respects with the courses of our American colleges for women.

But the association for the advancement of women has been at work and has awakened the German women out of their supine acquiescence and passive submission, and they are now beginning to press to the fore and assert their civil and social rights. They are now beginning to show, among other things, their disapproval and discontent in regard to the educational organization of the state. They are knocking at the doors of the universities for admission, which does not mean simply that they may be accorded the privilege of studying at these centers of learning. Admission to the universities implies more than this. If granted, it implies that the women are to be admitted to the privilege of entering upon the learned professions of the law and medicine, and so forth, from which, up to the present, they have been strenuously debarred. Hence the sturdy opposition they encounter. This desire on the part of the women is nothing less than a revolution in manners and a break in the conventions of a venerable custom—a custom which the Germans believe is more honored in the observance than in the breach.

The movement of the advocates of woman's rights is, therefore, in the nature of a revolt, and a revolt which the phlegmatic steady-going German does not welcome—nay, regrets. He even looks with distrust and evident dislike, in many cases, upon the woman of his own race (he will bear it with a certain condescension in the case of foreign women, perhaps as a mitigated evil) who applies for permission to attend lectures at the university. The writer well remembers

how, when he was studying at Leipzig, a certain German student, under the guise of banter, jeeringly called a Saxon girl who ventured to attend some lectures at the university a "blaustrumpf" (blue-stocking), and the host chimed in with manifest gusto. While it is true that some of the professors of the philosophical faculty do admit women to their lectures, those of the law and medical faculties, almost invariably deny them admission to their lectures. And the feeling on the part of those professors who yield to the modest request and feminine pleadings is not yet such as to give to the advocates of woman's rights the assurance of a speedy realization of their hopes. The inherited prejudice of the men that woman is a subaltern, designed to be dependent upon the stronger sex, militates forcibly against her cause.

But the German woman has no need to become discouraged, and doubtless will not. She shares with her brother the distinctive national genius for persistence, for steadiness, with commonness and humdrum for its defect, fidelity to nature for its excellence, as Matthew Arnold said. She will not fly into a passion and give up simply because she cannot have her own way from the start, as the old *Maréchale de Grancey*, the very antipode of the German type of women, is said to have done. Valbert tells the story of this able but extremely imperious woman, that after having amused herself sufficiently in life, she began to feel the need of some intellectual pursuit. On examining "*Plutarch's Lives of Great Men*," she inquired why he had not also written the lives of great women. One day the Abbé de Chateauneuf found her in a great rage. She had opened one of the Epistles of St. Paul, which was lying about her boudoir, and her eye had fallen on these words: "Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands." She was so enraged at the injunction of the apostle that she flung the book away. When the Abbé advised her that it was not necessary to take the apostle's precepts too literally or seriously, she replied, "I might have known he was a heretic," and went back to her toilet.

If, however, the German woman of to-day is looked down

upon and regarded as inferior to man, surely she of yesterday was not. In mediæval times no German would speak in derogatory tones of woman, but, on the contrary, he lauded her to the skies. Witness here the noble utterances of the poets of that period, such as Hartman von Aue, Reinmar, and Walter von der Vogelweide, who never tire of singing the praises of woman or of serving her. Reinmar puts his exalted opinion of her on record in these words: "I am suing for that which comprises all joys that a man can ever have in this world—namely, a woman." Ulrich von Lichtenstein was such a slave to his lady that he regarded her every wish and whim as a command to be cheerfully obeyed and executed. When, for example, she remarked that his mouth did not please her, he is said to have gone to the extreme of folly of having it operated on simply to please her. Some of the wandering gleemen of that day were almost as enthusiastic, though not quite so foolish as Ulrich, as, for instance, Freidank, who, with more sentiment than knowledge, derived the very name for woman (Frau) from the word "Freude" (delight), adding that women are the delight of all lands, are better than men, and have had an influence in everything that has happened in the world. Needless to say that Freidank's sentimental and fanciful etymology has long since been rejected by his prosaic successors, who surely see little delight and less beauty in the obese, submissive "Hausfrau" of to-day.

It was doubtless the fulsome flattery, the maudlin homage, the excessive follies of these latter-day minnesingers that helped to bring into disrepute the service rendered woman among the Germans. This mawkish sentimentality was, it must be admitted, the spirit of the age. It represents the decay of chivalry, which in Germany lessened the respect and homage formerly commanded by woman. No doubt, also, the teachings of the Church, especially as based on the precepts of St. Paul's Epistles, are a factor in the problem that cannot be ignored. But whether the influence of Christianity is as important a factor as some are inclined to think, is questionable.

The farther back we go in history the more exalted do we find was the position that woman occupied among the Germans. The Roman historian Tacitus, in his monograph on Germany, expressly notes the respect the women commanded. In the eighth chapter he tells of the warlike deeds of the brave women who had actually rallied retreating armies, and, through their stirring exhortations and by the interposition of their own bodies, had turned impending defeat into victory. Perhaps it was the presence of these Amazons in the German ranks that inspired in the breasts of the Roman legions that terror of which Cæsar speaks. Who knows but that the daring Thusnelda may have fought side by side with Hermann in the Teutoburger forest, where Varus received that blow which so wrung the heart of Augustus? Dio is authority for the statement that when Marcus Aurelius overthrew certain of the German allies, bodies of women in armor were found among the slain. Tacitus tells us that those German states that were obliged to give among their hostages daughters of noble families were the ones most effectually bound to fidelity.

Now if Tacitus were the only historian to relate the bold deeds of the German women, we might be inclined to be skeptical. But in view of the confirmatory evidence offered by other historians, we have no ground left for doubt, for these did not make any such serious indictment against the degeneracy of their times, the women included, as Tacitus did. How the severe historian of the decadent Roman Empire must have been grieved, as in those dissolute days he reflected upon the contrast suggested by two women, singularly typical of their respective nationalities in their times: the dignified, virtuous Thusnelda and the giddy, notorious Julia!

The German women were even supposed to possess somewhat of prescience and sanctity, says Tacitus, and the men did not despise either their counsels or their vaticinations. But their sisters of to-day may felicitate themselves that they have lost the former gift, if we are to credit the harrowing and gruesome account Strabo has handed down of the way

the prophetesses performed their divinations. I fear the moderns will draw but little comfort from the statement of Tacitus—if, indeed, they are not fired with envy—that their elder sisters were attentively listened to in the council and their advice followed. Surely they must have been far different from the type of woman known to the Roman poet of the Augustan Age (by the way, an old bachelor) who hit off her character in the ungallant words: “*Varium et mutabile semper femina.*”

After all, however, I cannot but think that the German woman of to-day, though she has lost some of the masculine qualities shared by her sister of yesterday, and has degenerated in point of independence, political rights, and *camaraderie*, has yet developed some virtues that compensate, at least in a measure, for those she has forfeited. She has a charm, a grace, a gentleness, a culture and refinement which her defiant and Amazonian sister of yesterday unquestionably must have lacked; and when she recovers her civil and social equality she will doubtless bear no unfavorable comparison with her cousins in England and America.

EDWIN W. BOWEN.